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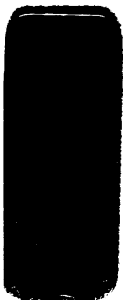
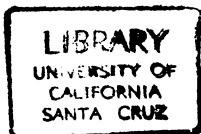
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# NOTES AND REVIEWS

By

Henry James

*With a Preface by* PIERRE DE CHAIGNON LA ROSE

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A Series of Twenty-five Papers Hitherto Unpublished in Book Form

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DUNSTER HOUSE

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## *Preface*

THE youthful Henry James, a few months beyond the age of twenty-one, began his literary career as critic, in *The North American Review* of October, 1864, with an unsigned review of Nassau W. Senior's "Essays on Fiction." In the present volume the editor has collected all of James's printed writings during the first three calendar years of his apprenticeship (1864, 1865, and 1866), with the exception of six papers which have already appeared in "book form." Of these six, two are stories: "A Landscape Painter" (*The Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1866) and "A Day of Days" (*The Galaxy*, June 15, 1866). Both were reprinted by Henry James himself in his collection of tales called "Stories Revived" (1865). The other four are unsigned book-reviews and may be found in Mr. Le Roy Phillips's volume of "Views and Reviews" (1908). These are "Matthew Arnold's Essays" (from *The North American Review*, July, 1865), "Mr. Walt Whitman" (from *The Nation*, November 16, 1865), "The Limitations of Dickens" (from *The Nation*, December 21, 1865), and "The Novels of George Eliot" (from *The Atlantic Monthly*, October, 1866).

The re-publication of the twenty-five papers



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contained in this volume, all unsigned book-reviews from either *The North American Review* or *The Nation*, is an attempt, not at predatory "book-making" in the manner of the egregious Mr. Wise or Mr. Shorter for the sake of unrestrained "collectors," but at presenting to the many lovers of Henry James, in a worthy form, a series of his writings hitherto comparatively inaccessible which may fairly be considered to constitute his literary journal — his reading from day to day and his passing but considered critical reactions thereon.

To reprint all the forgotten and unsigned journalistic scraps of an eminent author, fleeting papers which he himself refrained from reordering and reissuing, is often to do his memory a cruel disservice. For many of the most eminent men of letters have been obliged, especially in youth, to stoop to "pot-boiling," and many under the shelter of anonymity have lapsed into the common frailty of haste and slovenliness. The average "gentleman's library" is freighted with vast, polyteuchal, "definitive" editions of popular great authors which, to a literary taste as sensitive, let us say, as James's, would seem very largely impressive monuments to national deforestation rather than to a discriminating national literacy. But in the case of Henry James, fortunately or otherwise, we shall, I feel, be spared a completely "definitive" edition. A few devout Jacobites, the editor included, will regret this; but the reason is

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not far to seek. James, despite his present posthumous eminence, was never a "popular" author; and even the most devout Jacobite must admit, albeit with serene tranquillity, that he was not a "great" one. This is not quite the place to enter upon a discussion of fundamentals. I may be permitted to waive the point and aver merely, to the common agreement, that his work was endowed with a distinction and a personal charm which, to ears attuned to his peculiar appeal, will always be unrivalled. He was decidedly what he himself would have called a "special case." Even his youthful journalistic work will at once strike his accustomed readers as redolent of his personal "note." It was not "pot-boiling," as he was never quite under the economic necessity which resorts to that; and this being so, it could not be, with his temperament, either hasty or slovenly, however impenetrably anonymous. One may acquit oneself, therefore, of any disservice to his fine memory in collecting his early papers to give them out to his friends and lovers. One may even go to the lengths he prescribed in the case of Geoffrey Aspern, if in so doing one, as it were, draws from an old cabinet, in this instance unlocked, a forgotten daguerreotype of the '60's, a portrait for which he knowingly sat and himself autographed — eager, fresh, and charming.

But before analysing the revealing young portrait which these papers present, it will be well to consider for a moment the general literary task

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with which they concern themselves — that of “book-reviewing.” Nowadays, unfortunately, in America at least, one must discriminate between the art of literary criticism and the trade of book-reviewing. Originally one and the same thing, to-day, thanks to a commercialized press and a generation of publishers who regard their operations chiefly as a species of speculative manufacturing, in the United States what was once the art of reviewing has sunk to a level of degradation where it either contents itself with the dullest of pedestrian comment or is indistinguishable from the publisher’s unenlightened paid advertisement. In general, it is so abysmally and notoriously beneath contempt that it is scarcely worth while to mention the fact. It is, however, worth while, I think, to point out that half a century ago the case was quite different, that reviewing was among us by no means contemptible, and that not the least promising among our anonymous critics was a youth of twenty-one who quickly assumed an easy and distinguished posture among his elders in *The North American Review*. In the beginning, Henry James’s critical performances were not, of course, “first-rate,” — his youth, if nothing else, would militate against that. I am willing, reluctantly, to admit that, to the end, he was not a “great” critic: his steady preoccupation with problems of technique rendered that ultimate philosophical eminence unattainable (a constant, tragic paradox in all art).

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But even at the beginning his work was informed with distinction, distinction of thought and of expression. If one feels that he is occasionally ineffectual, because he was groping for a literary "form" which his youth had not yet achieved, one is never unaware of the charm with which his groping naturally invests itself. And so, if it served no other purpose, this collection of reviews by a youthful fellow-craftsman, now among the august dead, might, if studied seriously by reviewers of to-day in America, tend to revive a well-nigh extinct art; for these papers, whatever their faults, are the expression of an alert spirit, a discriminating intelligence, ardently devoting itself with rare singleness of purpose to a service the rewarding beauty of which it never doubts. Yet, after all, the chief function which this collection will perform, and one most welcomed by James's own faithful circle of readers, is that of self-portraiture.

By a singular felicity of chance, the series opens with a discussion of the art of fiction itself, the art which James was later to cultivate with such assiduity and peculiar success. His ingenuous statement of the "fictitious writer's" problem (he does make this single engaging slip!) is a bit of unconscious prophecy, a programme which he was himself to follow undeviatingly: what he wrote at twenty-one through divination, he might well have repeated at seventy in the light of experience. "The friends of a prolific novelist," he sug-

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gests, "must be frequently tempted to wonder at the great man's fertility of invention and to deprecate its moral effects . . . to which the prolific novelist will probably reply. . . . 'Just as the habitually busy man is the best novel-reader, so he is the best novel-writer; so the best novelist is the busiest man. It is, as you say, because I "grind out" my men and women that I endure them. It is because I create them by the sweat of my brow that I venture to look them in the face. My *work* is my salvation. If this great army of puppets came forth at my simple bidding, then indeed I should die of their senseless clamor. But as the matter stands, they are my very good friends. The pains of labor regulate and consecrate my progeny. . . . If the novelist endowed with the greatest "facility" ever known wrote with a tenth part of the ease attributed to him, then again his self-sufficiency might be a seventh wonder. But he only half suffices to himself, and it is the constant endeavor to supply the missing half, to make both ends meet, that reconciles him to his occupation.'" "The Missing Half," by Henry James: here, I propound, is a general title in his own arresting vein for the long series of his own reconciliatory "Comédie Humaine."

Among the list of writers whom James discusses in this volume are an exceptional number of names which have weathered the last half-century, some of the first importance, some of secondary but still enduring worth; only a few will

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be unknown to his younger readers. One will be amused, and if a confirmed Jacobite not at all surprised, to see how time has in general confirmed the early judgments of the youthful critic. And readers who themselves have ever ventured into "reviewing" will at once seek out with curiosity the grounds and terms of the critic's likes and dislikes.

The grounds of some few of James's dislikes are certainly constitutional. I, for one, in view of the future "Turn of the Screw" and "What Maisie Knew," have been perhaps unreasonably diverted by this little passage: "The heroine of 'Moods' is a fitful, wayward, and withal most amiable young person, named Sylvia. We regret to say that Miss Alcott takes her up in her childhood. We are utterly weary of stories about precocious little girls. In the first place, they are themselves disagreeable and unprofitable objects of study; and in the second, they are always the precursors of a not less unprofitable middle-aged lover." (The lover in this instance is an advanced thirty-five!) — And at fifty-four he himself gives us an acute study of perhaps the most pathetically precocious little girl in English fiction. But at twenty-one, himself unsuspectingly precocious, his interest in "juvenilia," if it ever was quite normal, is magnificently held in abeyance. One gets an echo of something of this twenty years later in the grounds of Stevenson's gay complaint of James. "He cannot," writes Stevenson in "A

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Humble Remonstrance," "criticise the author as he goes, 'because,' says he, comparing it with another work, '*I have been a child, but I have never been on a quest for buried treasure.*' Here is, indeed, a wilful paradox; for if he has never been on a quest for buried treasure, it can be demonstrated that he has never been a child. There never was a child (unless Master James) but has hunted gold, and been a pirate, and a military commander, and a bandit of the mountains. . . ." One cannot escape the conviction from the outset that the hidden treasure to which "Master James" surprisingly early devoted the search of a lifetime was a purely literary one. And in such a search the interruptions of juvenile Sylvias become something of a resentible impertinence.

Scarcely more than half a dozen of the novels herein reviewed are now hopelessly dead and beyond discussion; but one may read the reviews of even these with interest, for from them one gets a vivid and fresh impression of the fleeting literary fashion of a definite period. James, like any healthy young reviewer, enjoys "roasting" them. He equally enjoys, as does any reviewer worth his salt, finding specimens which he can with a clear conscience generously praise. It is the hopelessly "middling" books which one can neither magisterially excoriate nor benignantly garland which set the reviewer his most exacting and thankless task. From this last group James seems, as far as possible, to have avoided choos-

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ing his subjects. And, rather surprisingly, it is in the first group that he seems inclined to place Anthony Trollope, three of whose works he reviews in this volume. If he grows "utterly weary" over the stories about "precocious little girls," so he evinces a temperamental disposition to weariness in taking up a novel by Trollope, that soother of sleepless bedsides and solace of infirmaries. The colloquial term "roasting" is perhaps unduly harsh for the treatment which James's few victims receive at his hands, for in general his admonitions are wrapped in a friendly wit and his disapproval phrased with a high urbanity. Nevertheless, Trollope fares rather ill with him. But he himself in his first discussion of the art of fiction, gives us, unconsciously, the reason — which is, again, youth. "Certain young persons," he gravely explains, under the cover of a presumably mature anonymity, "are often deeply concerned at their elders' interest in a book which they themselves have voted either very dull or very silly. The truth is that their elders are more credulous than they. Young persons, however they may outgrow the tendency in later life, are often more or less romancers on their own account. While the tendency lasts, they are very critical in the matter of fictions." Although this "tendency" was one which he, fortunately for us, never outgrew, time certainly mellowed and refined his judgment, notably in the case of Trollope, to whose memory he makes,



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in 1883, a very handsome and delicately discriminating amend, now familiar to us in "Partial Portraits."

James's treatment of Swinburne also shows us for the first time a little limitation of sympathy which, in this instance, was not to be confined to his youth but, I feel, was characteristic of his mature years. One may readily agree with all that he says of "Chastelard"; one may keenly enjoy the clear-sightedness with which he picks out its shortcomings and the neat precision with which he makes his "points"; yet one cannot fail to note that except for a final cursory sentence in his review, the play might perfectly well have been written in prose, for all that we gather from the critic. His preoccupation is with its dramatic technique, with its ineffectually solved problems of "characterization," "movement," what you will. This is, of course, wholly legitimate — up to a certain point; but, after all, the play is in verse. And to its poetry, as such, he is unexpectedly insensitive. Few men other than dilettanti, certainly few artists, have room in themselves for a reasoned appreciation of all the arts. But it is ever instructive to note their self-denials or restrictions. With James you will hunt in vain for any printed indication of a love of music. His love of the art of painting, especially of portraiture, was intense and colored many pages of his fictions. But in his long career as a critic he has given us but three deliberately reasoned studies

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of poets, and these three poets are French: de Musset, Gautier, and Baudelaire. It is, to me at least, singular that a master of English prose, a critic so exquisitely endowed (and so voluminous) should have left so little indication in his published writings of a love of English poetry.

But many of even his accustomed readers will find for the first time, among the following papers, Henry James's one measured excursion into the field of formal Philosophy, that family paddock in which he might well have romped with the brilliant gaiety of his eminent brother. The essay on Epictetus with its admirable discussion of Stoicism is a wholly unexpected little "James" treasure which one would not willingly have missed. As a measure, thus early, of his intellectual calibre, of his spiritual poise and sanity, of his indefeasible kinship, it assumes to the student and lover of James a value far beyond its own critical importance.

And so one might go on, discussing paper after paper in the light of his subsequent publications and detaining the reader from the real purpose of the book which is, as I said in the beginning, to be found in James's unconscious self-portraiture. It is a pleasure to share, in these resurrected pages of his, those years of his fastidiously intelligent reading and to come upon the most rewarding number of felicities of thought and of diction. But it is even more of a delight to find revealed through them the familiar features of a loved

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author in his young prime, features already stamped with that distinguishing quality which throughout his long life never grew blurred or dimmed — his supremely endearing “fineness.”

PIERRE DE CHAIGNON LA ROSE.

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS,  
February 18, 1921.

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I

*Fiction and Sir Walter Scott*

WE opened this work with the hope of finding a general survey of the nature and principles of the subject of which it professes to treat. Its title had led us to anticipate some attempt to codify the vague and desultory canons, which cannot, indeed, be said to govern, but which in some measure define, this department of literature. We had long regretted the absence of any critical treatise upon fiction. But our regret was destined to be embittered by disappointment.

The title of the volume before us is a misnomer. The late Mr. Senior would have done better to call his book *Essays on Fictions*. *Essays on the Novelists*, even, would have been too pretentious a name. For in the first place, Mr. Senior's novelists are but five in number; and in the second, we are treated, not to an examination of their general merits, but to an exposition of the plots of their different works. These *Essays*, we are told, appeared in four of the leading English Reviews at intervals from the year 1821 to the year 1857. On the whole, we do not think they were worth this present resuscitation. Individually respect-

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"*Essays on Fiction*." By Nassau W. Senior. London: 1864.



## NOTES AND REVIEWS

able enough in their time and place, they yet make a very worthless book. It is not necessarily very severe censure of a magazine article to say that it contains nothing. Sandwiched between two disquisitions of real merit, it may subsist for a couple of weeks upon the accidental glory of its position. But when half a dozen empty articles are bound together, they are not calculated to form a very substantial volume. Mr. Senior's papers may incur the fate to which we are told that inanimate bodies, after long burial, are liable on exposure to the air, — they crumble into nothing. Much better things have been said on these same authors than anything Mr. Senior has given us. Much wiser *dicta* than his lie buried in the dusty files of the minor periodicals. His remarks are but a dull restatement of the current literary criticism. He is superficial without being lively; he is indeed so heavy, that we are induced to wonder why his own weight does not force him below the surface.

But he brings one important quality to his task. He is evidently a very good novel-reader. For this alone we are grateful. By profession not a critic nor a maker of light books, he yet read novels thoughtfully. In his eyes, we fancy, the half-hour "wasted" over a work of fiction was recovered in the ensuing half-hour's meditation upon it. That Mr. Senior was indeed what is called a "confirmed" novel-reader, his accurate memory for details, his patient research into in-

BY HENRY JAMES

consistencies, — dramatic, historic, geographic, — abundantly demonstrate. The literary judgments of persons not exclusively literary are often very pleasant. There are some busy men who have read more romances and verses than twenty idle women. They have devoured all James and Dumas at odd hours. They have become thoroughly acquainted with Bulwer, Coventry Patmore, and the morning paper, in their daily transit to their place of business. They have taken advantage of a day in bed to review all Richardson. It is only because they are hard-working men that they can do these things. They do them to the great surprise of their daughters and sisters, who stay at home all day to practise listless sonatas and read the magazines. If these ladies had spent the day in teaching school, in driving bargains, or in writing sermons, they would readily do as much. For our own part, we should like nothing better than to write stories for weary lawyers and schoolmasters. Idle people are satisfied with the great romance of doing nothing. But busy people come fresh to their idleness. The imaginative faculty, which has been gasping for breath all day under the great pressure of reason, bursts forth when its possessor is once ensconced under the evening lamp, and draws a long breath in the fields of fiction. It fills its lungs for the morrow. Sometimes, we regret to say, it fills them in rather a fetid atmosphere; but for the most part it inhales the whole-

## NOTES AND REVIEWS

some air of Anglo-Saxon good sense. Certain young persons are often deeply concerned at their elders' interest in a book which they themselves have voted either very dull or very silly. The truth is, that their elders are more credulous than they. Young persons, however they may out-grow the tendency in later life, are often more or less romancers on their own account. While the tendency lasts, they are very critical in the matter of fictions. It is often enough to damn a well-intentioned story, that the heroine should be called Kate rather than Katherine; the hero Anthony rather than Ernest. These same youthful critics will be much more impartial at middle age. Many a matron of forty will manage to squeeze out a tear over the recital of a form of courtship which at eighteen she thought absurdly improbable. She will be plunged in household cares; her life will have grown prosaic; her thoughts will have overcome their bad habits. It would seem, therefore, that as her knowledge of life has increased, her judgment of fiction, which is but a reflection of life, should have become more unerring. But it is a singular fact, that as even the most photographically disposed novels address pre-eminently the imagination, her judgment, if it be of the average weight, will remain in abeyance, while her rejuvenated imagination takes a holiday. The friends of a prolific novelist must be frequently tempted to wonder at the great man's fertility of invention, and to deprecate its